

# Theodora Shonts' Latest Romance That Leaves Her Still A Duchess

How the Widow of the Duke de Chaumes Was Wooed and Won by Her Husband's Nephew, Himself the Possessor of One of France's Most Ancient Ducal Titles

A Miniature of the Duchess Painted by a Noted Artist.

A DUCHESS always has been supposed to be a peculiarly happy individual, proud and disdainful, autocratic and the mistress, not only of all the smaller fry that revolve within the orbit of such a noble personage, but mistress of herself and all her impulses as well.

No one ever thinks a duchess would permit herself to be denied anything at all—not even the heart of the man she might fall in love with. But now, from Paris, comes news that proves that when a duchess falls in love she is confronted with troubles and heartaches and pitfalls which even the most romantic American girl could never dream of as ever coming to her.

The news from Paris is that Theodora, Duchess de Chaumes, daughter of the late Theodore P. Shonts, the traction magnate of New York and one of the builders of the Panama Canal, has announced her engagement to the young Duke de Creusot, scion of one of the most famous families of the French nobility and one of the important leaders among the royalist set which still hopes for the eventual return to power of the Bourbons in the person of the Duc d'Orleans, pretender to the throne.

Theodora's marriage in New York, in 1908, to the Duc de Chaumes, was the scene of one of the most exciting "society scrambles" ever staged in America, with such as Mrs. George Gould, Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish and Mrs. Hermann Oelrichs standing, "packed like sardines," in the halls and on the stairways in the Shonts home for hours just to catch a glimpse of the ducal bride and have it known that they were among those honored with wedding invitations.

Six weeks later the bridegroom died from a sudden attack of heart failure in a Paris hotel. The young duchess was prostrated with grief. Her sister-in-law, the prominent Duchess d'Uzes, said at the time: "We never knew how much an American girl could love, and we never suspected that little Theodora loved Emanuel so deeply. We shall take her into the family, and adopt her as one of us."

And right there, with that comforting of a great honor and a great trust upon the American duchess, widowed at the height of her honeymoon, the trouble that lies in being a duchess—a beautiful widowed duchess, that is—began to pile up for her.

In France, among the great families that are bound up in traditions of the past, memories of the golden days of the Louis and the First and Second Empires, there is an institution known as the "Conseil de Famille," which is the French way of saying "the family council." So powerful is this family council among the nobility that the French courts almost invariably sustain its rulings if they are questioned. Thus the heads of a family really are the rulers of the whole family and may at will dictate what each individual member may do with his or her money or time or heart.

There was a ponthous child. It was a son. Sons are very important in the ducal set of any European nation. And this little son of Theodora Shonts was very important indeed, for he not only was destined to become the Duc de Chaumes, as his father was known, but also the Duc de Chevreuse, the Duc de Montfort, the Duc de Picquigny, the Duc d'Angouleme and the Prince de Gallatin, and maybe the Duc de Luynes. All these titles, except the last, had come down to his father through intermarriages between noble families associated with Louis XIV. and XV. and the son of course would inherit them. The proudest of these titles was that of de Chaumes, because the Duc de Chaumes always was, since Charles the Seventh down to the Republic, Grand Constable of France and First Chamberlain of the King's household.

The present Duke de Luynes, one of the leaders in French social life, a very wealthy nobleman whose title dates back to Charlemagne, is titular head of the de Chaumes family. Should his only son, who is very sickly, die, the young son of Theodora would become Duc de Luynes also, and would inherit the great castle of Dampierre, now Theodora's French home, and all the rich de Luynes estates.

When the family council, headed by the aristocratic Duc de Luynes met, shortly after the death of the Duc de Chaumes, and decided, after serious conference, that the young American duchess would be accepted as a member of the de Luynes family in her own right, she became really more of a duchess than she would have been if her husband had lived.

But, the family council warned her, as the acknowledged and accepted Duchess de Chaumes, she bore great responsibilities. She was to become the mother of a Duc de Chaumes and Picquigny and Montfort and de Chevreuse and d'Angouleme etc., etc., and of all the things she must be most careful about, falling in love again was the

most important. Never, said the family council, must she fall in love with anyone who would not be fit to become the stepfather and guardian of the family heir—the young Duc de Chaumes.

The young duchess declared she would spend her life in devotion to the memory of her husband, and in reading the history of his noble ancestors, and never think of another man. After a while, though, there came a time when she thought the thoughts of youth and wondered.

It was then she asked just what that order of family council meant about her never falling in love unless with one who would be acceptable as a guardian of the young Duc de Chaumes, now fast growing into a promising boyhood.

The order was duly interpreted. It could not prevent her, of course, from marrying anyone whom she might select. But if that new husband did not measure up to the standards imposed by the "conseil de famille," then the little duc, her son, would be taken from her and she would be banished from the ducal circle—which meant from all noble French society. Few homes would dare receive a Duchess de Chaumes who had been ostracized by her family council.

"And if I defy the council to take my child away from me?" the American duchess asked.

"That would not serve you at all," the answer was. "The courts of France always sustain the findings of a family council in such a matter, and would make the order a formal decree of court upon application by the Duc de Luynes. You might steal your son away to America, but if you did that you never could land in France again without being made to suffer the penalty for kidnapping, and the Duc could never come to his native land again without being

at once taken into legal custody and restored to the keeping of his ducal relatives."

"But am I never to marry again?" the duchess asked plaintively.

"Oh, there is no bar to that," the oracle of the family council assured her. "But, you must remember, that your son is the heir to not only one but several dukedoms, and he would be much embarrassed, as would his family, if his mother were anything less than a duchess, or, indeed, if his mother were a duchess ranking beneath, in the ducal scale, the Duc de Chaumes himself."

"But," cried Theodora, "there are almost no ducs at all, in all France, and none abroad except those with royal blood, who rank as high as my son will when he comes into all his titles. Of course, I don't think I shall ever want to marry again, for there hardly can be a man in the world as noble and good as was the Duc, but suppose I should, must I remain single all my life because there are so few men of rank equal to mine and my son's?"

"You must answer that question your own way, my dear," said the spokesman for the family council. "That is your problem in being a duchess."

To twelve years went by. During all this time the young duchess thought very little, it is true, of her "problem in being a duchess," because she could never forget the wonderful husband she had had for so short a time, and the heart-breaking that came with his tragic death. She never put aside her mourning in all these years, although after a time she began gradually to take her proper place in French society and to entertain and be entertained in the beautiful chateaux of old France. Whenever she went, though, she went in sombre black. She devoted

her years to the bringing up of her little son.

Although her husband, in the gaiety of his youth, had spent the generous fortune he inherited from his grandmother, the Duchess de Chevreuse, the great castle of Dampierre, where the de Luynes live, and where the family council of the de Chaumes family sits, was thrown open to her, and here she made her home. Her dearest friend always has been the proud Duchess d'Uzes, the actual leader of French society, and her sister-in-law.

One after another of the most desirable young men of France, England and Spain have paid court to the young duchess. And one after another each one of these has been dismissed by the family council. Some of them might have made the most satisfactory husbands—except that they would have taken from the mother of the Duc de Chaumes her title and estate, and she no longer would have been a duchess. Then there came to Dampierre, to recover from wounds earned in battle the dashing young Duc de Creusot, a nephew,

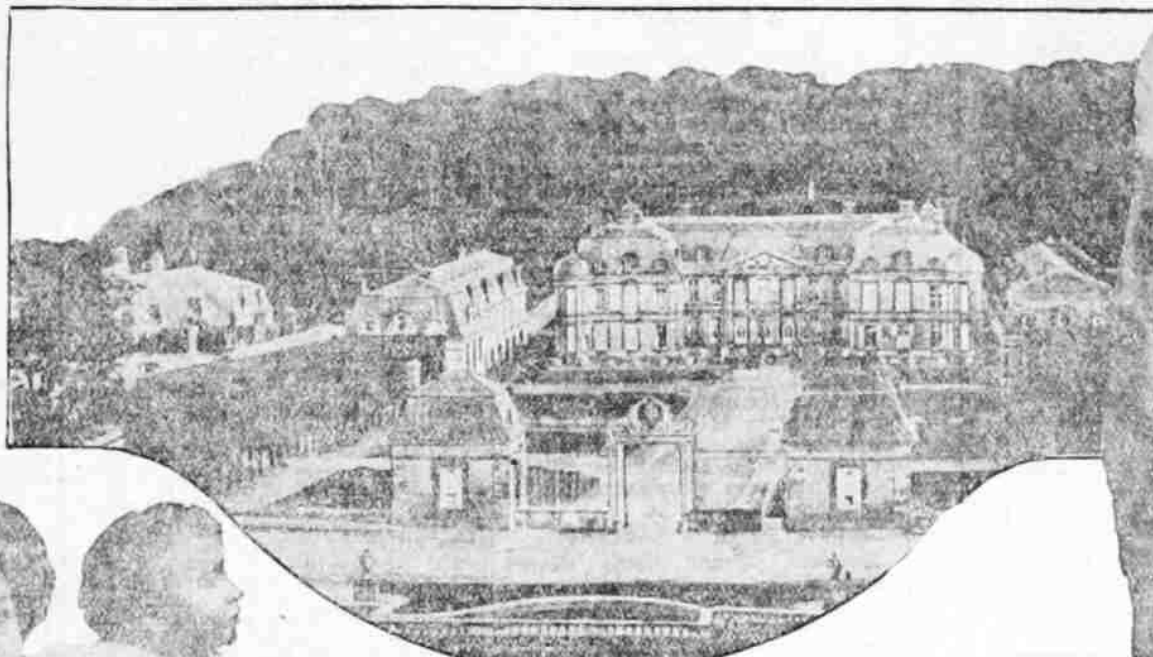
through her marriage, of the Duchess de Chaumes. The Duc had won many medals in the trenches, and had added new lustre to his family name.

During his convalescence on the great green lawns of Dampierre, the Duc began to take more than a nephew's interest in the widow-duchess. She had been his nurse, and now he asked her, in that blunt, straightforward way that soldiers learn to use in their wooing, if she would not change her black for a wedding gown, and her title to that of Duchess de Creusot.

"She said she wouldn't," he said, "which only means that you will some day, because, I'll never stop bothering you."

She replied to this that she was afraid to fall in love because she could not tell what the family council would say to any one who wanted to marry her, and that if it should dismiss a suitor whom she really had learned to love, then her unhappiness would begin all over again. And she didn't want to risk it.

The father of the Duchess, Mr. Shonts,



Dampierre, the Historic Seat of the de Chaumes "Family Council" and the French Home of the American Duchess. Here She Will Spend Her Second Honeymoon With Her New Duke. At the Left Is the Duchess With Her Little Son, Emanuel, Who Will Inherit Dampierre and Half a Dozen Other Castles and Dukedoms as Well. He Is Being Brought Up at Dampierre Now. It Was to This Beautiful Chateau the Duc de Chaumes Took Theodora Shonts When She Became His Bride.



The Duc de Creusot (at the Right), Who Has Won the American Duchess, and His Chum in the Trenches, the Famous Comte de Saint Leon, Who Came Over to America to Help the Duc Win the Duchess. The Comte Will Be the Duc's Best Man at the Wedding.

Theodora, Duchess de Chaumes, Daughter of T. P. Shonts, the Late Traction Magnate, Who Was Forbidden by the Council of Her Dead Husband's Family to Marry Again Unless Her Heart Could Pick Out Another Duke. At Last a Real Duke Followed Her Across the Atlantic and, Establishing Himself in Her Home Over Here, Wooed and Won Her. And Won, Too, the Haughty "Family Council."

died, and she came to America. The circumstances under which Mr. Shonts died were so distressing to the Duchess that she wrote back to France of her double grief. The young Duc, hearing from his relative of the added sufferings of the Duchess, sped to America to be close to her if she needed him.

Gaby Deslys came to America on the same steamer and, always on the alert for an opportunity to embellish the notoriety she had gained as the favorite of royalty, she caused it to be announced that the distinguished young Duc de Creusot had come to America in pursuit of her. She knew that a de Creusot would never dispute a woman's boasting.

It was very embarrassing for the puzzled Duc, and it came about that though he came to America to help the Duchess, it was she who helped him. Newspaper reporters, set upon his trail by the piquant Gaby, would not let him alone. There was no place for him to hide—until the Duchess opened her home to him and took him into hiding there as the guest of her mother, Mrs. Shonts.

Proximity always has been the sesame to love. The Duc's closest chum, his companion of the trenches, the Comte de Saint Leon, came to America just to help plead for him. The amiable Mrs. Shonts took in the Comte de Saint Leon also. The little Duchess could not withstand the both of them.

She agreed to put aside her mourning for a new wedding gown—if!

That "if" conjured up the spectre of the family council.

They hurried away to France on the same steamer. The Duc called upon the Duc de Luynes and asked consent for his marriage to Theodora, Duchess de Chaumes.

The Duc de Luynes at once assembled the family council. The Duchess d'Uzes, the Duchess de Luynes, the Comte de Dion, and his other members, first called the Duc de Creusot before them. He made his plea and measured his love for Theodora that all of them might know just how much, and deep, it was. He promised all those things which such a family would require of a husband for the mother of the family heir.

Then Theodora was summoned into the great council chamber at Dampierre. She trembled. She did not know what the verdict was to be. It was the Duchess d'Uzes who told her.

"We have given our consent, my dear, because, besides being as worthy of you as any man could be, you will still remain a Duchess."